

New Light on History's Most Beautiful Man

Why Antinous Ended His Life at Twenty-five, and the Strange City Where He Was Perpetually Wept and Adored as a God



Exquisite Marble Relief, Which Gives a New Conception of the Beauty of Antinous.

RECENT labors of archaeologists, both in Italy and Egypt, have thrown new light on the life and appearance of Antinous, reputed to have been the most beautiful man that ever lived.

These researches have a peculiar interest for Americans, an interest much more than scholastic, for they take us back to an age when manly beauty was actually worshipped, and a supremely beautiful man was raised to the rank of a god.

It is worth while to learn what was the state of mind of people who entertained such sentiments, and what there was of value in them. To study such a subject makes us realize that in America to-day we almost entirely neglect the cultivation of man's beauty.

Is it not strange that we should think only of the beauty of one-half of humanity? In a country that is given over to girl adulation to a remarkable extent, one rarely speaks of the charm of a beautiful youth.

We have hitherto known but little of the life of Antinous, partly because the great romance and mystery of his life were buried in the sands of ancient Egypt. He was born in Bithynia, Asia Minor, where he became a shepherd boy. His beauty and grace attracted the attention of the Emperor Hadrian, that philosopher and artist who ruled over the Roman world from 117 to 138 A. D., and he became his attendant and companion.

Wherever the Emperor went he took Antinous with him. During one of these journeys the beautiful youth drowned himself in the River Nile, about the year 132 A. D. It was on this spot that the sorrowing Emperor built the city which he called Antinoe or Antinopolis, where his favorite was worshipped as an incarnation of the ancient Egyptian God Osiris.

Why Antinous killed himself has always been a great mystery, and while no positive evidence has been discovered upon this point, it has to a certain extent been elucidated by scholarly research. Antinous, it is estimated, was twenty-five years old at the time, and in the prime of life and beauty. As the favorite of the master of the whole civilized world he had every possible luxury, every known form of wealth and enjoyment within his reach. And he had been a shepherd boy a few years before! Why should such a man commit suicide?

Two views have been advanced on this subject. One is that he had been told by a seer that he would bring death to the Emperor Hadrian, and that to avert this possibility he killed himself. This has the support of Eusebius, but he is a very unreliable historian, who has to tell interesting anecdotes even though it is necessary to invent them. There is no other authority for the story.

Another explanation is that Antinous had grown weary of the inexhaustible luxury that he enjoyed, a condition that has certainly been reached by some. In view of the youth of Antinous, his health and strength, it is plainly unreasonable.

Archaeologists have now given their support to a new version of the mystery, which goes deeper into human nature and is more philosophical than any of the others. This is that Antinous ended his life because he realized that he had reached the height of his beauty, and that in a few years it must begin to leave him.

He had been valued for his beauty alone. Without it the poor fellow reflected that he could be nothing. If he died when his body was in the full bloom of its perfection he would leave the memory of a supremely beautiful man. If he died a withered, wrinkled, gray, toothless old man, he could leave no such memory. His youth then would have been forgotten.

He reasoned well, for his death enshrined him in the world's memory and caused the Emperor to build a city where his beauty was worshipped.

Hitherto we have had only a limited knowledge of the physical appearance of Antinous. This was obtained partly from the colossal statue in the Vatican, representing him in the character of Bacchus, ivy-crowned and holding a staff or sceptre. The head, strong and square with full face, is somewhat stern in expression, and not what we would expect in one who lived for beauty.

Another statue, in the Capitoline Museum, at Rome, shows him as a shepherd boy. His drooping head and melancholy expression have been regarded as foreshadowing his early death.

A newer portrait of Antinous is in the form of a marble sculptured relief, recovered from the excavations of Hadrian's villa. This shows the favorite as a splendidly formed young man, with powerful chest, regular, full intelligent features and the expression of one who enjoys all life's luxuries. He has a wreath of flowers around his head and holds a bouquet of them in one hand. We feel instinctively that this is more like the real Antinous than other portraits.

Most remarkable of all is a statue showing him in the form of Osiris, as he was worshipped at Antinoe. This indicates like the marble relief that he was a man of remarkable stalwart and majestic physique, as well as strikingly fine and intelligent features.

On the site of ancient Antinoe, in Egypt, many new details have been unearthed by Professor Albert Gayet, of Paris, concerning the life of this

unique character and especially concerning the worship instituted in his honor by Hadrian.

"At Antinoe there was a revival of the religion of earlier days," says Professor Gayet. "Greeks and Romans thirsting for the Unknown grasped at all foreign mysteries, especially at those of Isis, of Mithra, of the Black Stone, and the One Life. Hadrian decreed that his favorite, who sacrificed his life to cheat destiny, should receive the honors reserved for the supreme god of the Egyptians, Osiris, the god of the nether world, who had himself been slain by his brother, the Prince of Evil."

"In this mortuary city, larger and more luxurious than Alexandria under the Ptolemies, everything turned upon the worship of Osiris-Antinous. Beautiful priestesses wept for him perpetually. Female musicians, singers and dancers played important parts."

The most amazing ceremony was that in which the people of Antinoe constantly mourned the death of Osiris-Antinous.



Four of the Minor Weepers Mourning the Death of Osiris-Antinous, Detail reconstructed from the Wall Paintings of Antinoe.

other women. She was made to kneel at the threshold of the sanctuary; they painted the name Isis on her shoulders, and so the personality of the queen of heaven was delegated to her."

The entire scene as it must have passed in ancient times is described by Professor Gayet and has been illustrated from his description.

"At the base are ideal mountains, white, pearly, rosy, standing out from huge masses, cut by violet shadows, where the facades of the funeral chapels rise above the darkness with their gilded pyramids. It is at the end of the Triumphal Way, which bounds the City of Antinoe, of the Arch of Triumph, erected on the bank of the Nile, at the gateway of the Way of Tombs, opening upon the necropolis, by the side of the Temple of Isis. A procession comes on, following a corpse to its eternal resting place, with the same ceremonies as of old, in the time of the Pharaohs.

The Statue of Antinous in the Form of the God Osiris, Creator of Good and Guardian of the Soul After Death, Found at Antinoe, Where He Was Perpetually Mourned.

death. A wagon, shaped like a boat, drawn by eight oxen, bears a catafalque, made of panels of painted wood, representing the regions of the invisible world, the guardian genii of the labyrinths leading thereto; the reception by the protecting gods.

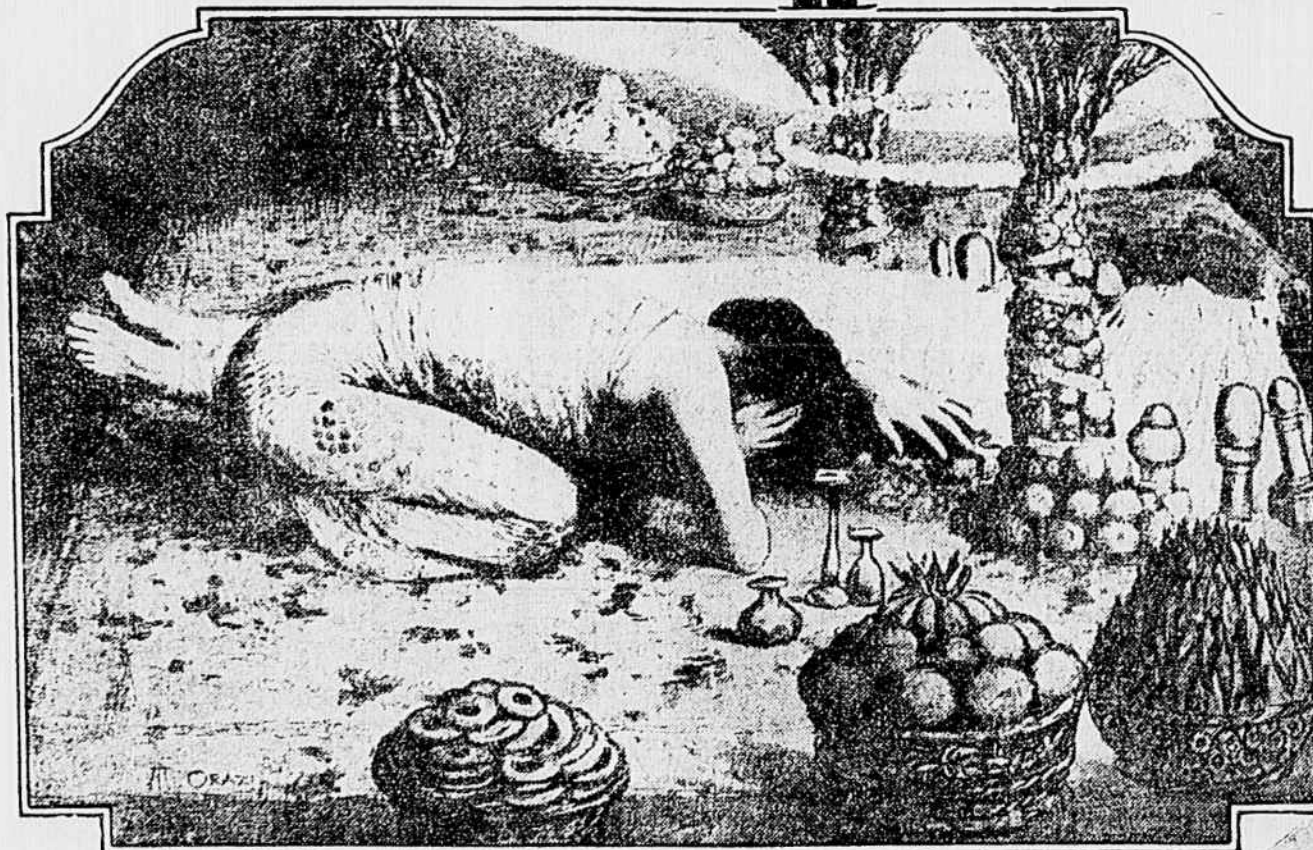
"Two priests walk near him, burning incense and making libations. Then comes another boat on which is a platform like an altar, with the Weepers on it; some of them are standing, others crouching with dishevelled hair, their hands on their heads, lamenting and calling upon the departed soul. Then, at the entrance to the necropolis, is the Great Weeper and her acolyte, who place themselves just behind the catafalque."

The conclusion of this wild, fantastic, yet splendid scene, is described in these words:

"The chanting of verses swells ever higher. Lamps are lighted all around, illumining the night with funeral glare; the vengeful divinities, guardians of the tomb appear, formidable, fateful, with weapons in their hands, ready to strike; men covered with armor, wearing on their heads masks of hawks and jackals; women with lions' heads, clad in flowing robes, armed with knives and darts. They come forward, led by the Great Weeper, and the play continues until the third hour, in the contest against the troops of the army of evil. Seth, the murderer, commands them in person. He has taken on the garb of the Red Hippopotamus. A number of his soldiers fall to earth wounded; the others flee, shouting in terror. And now the avenging goddesses have already abandoned the pursuit, and group themselves around the sarcophagus beneath the catafalque, then open and empty, into which the red rays of the lamp shine, so as to form the image of the red disk of the sun within."

"Then Isis, escorted by the small Weeper, approaches the funeral bed and the avenging deities are grouped around her. She rests on the sarcophagus and calls: 'Osiris of the West! Osiris of the West! Osiris of the West!' Just as the goddess called in ancient times to bring him back to life. And so, too, tears flow upon the sarcophagus again, while the avenging deities raise the mystic Eye, symbol of creative tears, triumphs over death."

This was the memory of the most beautiful man, honored for centuries after his death.



Isidora, the Great Weeper, Mourning Over the Dead in the Strange Burial Ceremony of the City of Antinoe.

"We found the cave of Isidora the Weeper, and in it was fixed one of the great scenes of the religious history of Egypt," reports Professor Gayet. "A little cave, modest in its proportions, built of unbaked bricks, and beneath the vault a mummy, well wrapped in shroud and bands; a branch of persea flowers, some baked clay figurines, some lamps, and diadems sealed with the mystic eye, the ancient outya; not an in-

scription, but only on the wrappings, embroidered three times, the name Isidora. Unwrapping the bands, I found that the first veil was passed about the dead woman's head, in the style of an Isis veil. Beneath this I found the matted hair, brought over the face, and nothing more than this arrangement was needed to point to her having been one of the Weepers, as they are found in the antique pictures, which show us the procession accompanying a body."

"The book states that when they heard of the death of Osiris—the good god, slain by his brother, Seth, the Genius of Evil—Isis, their sister, covered her face with her hair, pressed both hands on her forehead, and raised her voice to heaven, a simple expression which can mean nothing save that she wept. And this the gods had done, and men, too, whenever this dolorous anniversary occurred."

"In the passage of time the opinion prevailed that every one who wished to attain the felicity of the future life should receive the same funeral honors which Osiris received from Isis in ancient times. Whenever any one died, some woman called the 'Great Weeper' imitated, imitating in every detail the

scenario of the honors rendered to the god by the goddess. The one selected for this purpose was picked out from the company of recluses of Isis, the texts state, a woman 'more beautiful in every respect than all

"At the head marches an officer wearing a surplice, carrying a vase holding the astral water of the tears of Isis, and a long roll of papyrus. He reads the formulae granting to the dead entrance into the region of

How Fashion Plates Deceive Women

MOST women, measured by an ideal standard of beauty, are too tall or too thin, too short or too stout; they do not stand well, they walk badly, or they have spoiled their complexions by hook or by crook—something is wrong. The dressmaker's art is to cover these defects so far as possible, to draw attention away from defects toward the good points of the figure.

The ideally beautiful woman can wear anything from a Greek gown to a peasant costume, and look divine, says Belle Armstrong Wright in Good Health. But with very few exceptions allowed for the perfect woman, designs in dress must be adapted before they

can be adopted to advantage.

Fashion plates are drawn upon beautifully tall and fair women to show the proper proportions to be observed in the designs themselves, according to the mind of the designing artist.

Some designs are hopelessly bad at the beginning, and others are good only for certain types of women. Designs, however good in themselves, are not meant to be slavishly copied.

A woman six feet tall may wear a dress skirt eight or ten yards wide at the bottom, but the dumpy little woman who is as broad as she is long will be a ridiculous figure in the same enormous sweep of skirt.

